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Organized effort: its
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Box 103

ADDRESS BY
GEO. A. POST

At the Annual Business Meeting of
the Railway Business Association

December 10, 1914

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Organized Effort: Its Necessity, Its Benefits and Its Achievements

Address by

GEO. A. POST

President of the Railway Business Association

Delivered at the Annual Business Meeting of the Railway Business Association, the national association of manufacturers of railway materials, equipment and supplies, at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York, December 10, 1914

Brethren of the Railway Business Association:

I greet you with affectionate cordiality, at the close of the sixth year of our comradeship in the work undertaken by us. I have no statistical data for your consumption; there is nothing that I could or would add to the resume of existing conditions, and suggestions for betterment thereof so ably and comprehensively set forth in the report of the General Executive Committee. I shall, therefore, take advantage of the courtesy and patience which you have always shown me at the opening of our annual meeting and pour into your ears a heartfelt eulogy upon the necessity, benefits and achievements of organized effort for the propagation of sound business principles.

Six years ago the group of industries now represented in this Association had suffered for long months the strain and the drain of stagnation. At this moment those same interests for a substantially equal period have undergone a famine more acute on the whole than that of 1908. Yet now in the midst of depleted tonnage, shrunken pay-rolls and evaporating dividends we are warranted in having

and many of us do have a feeling of hopefulness which makes the despondency of 1908 seem despair itself by comparison.

HOW TO PREVENT ANTI-CORPORATION SENTIMENT

To understand what has happened meantime is to comprehend what business men can do through coming years for the national well-being. We are met to confer upon that question. It is my honest judgment that no group of men have learned the lesson better than we have. Stripped of the detail of issues and the anxiety of situations, the thing needed is for men of affairs to keep on getting together and staying together and looking one another in the eye and striving in a spirit of the highest honesty to see with the largest wisdom the need of every hour.

A royal visitor to these shores in 1902 sat down to dinner with the American captains of industry. He was eager to meet them and America was proud to show them. Public and press had sung adulation. Afterwards they changed their tune to a roar of resentment which echoed and re-echoed through a decade

of vengeance. How did that happen? Why may it not happen again?

Not a man in this room but knows. It could have been prevented if those men had been acquainted with one another and had formed the habit of consultation. It can be kept from repeating itself if such men go on, and as long as they go on, getting acquainted and keeping acquainted.

CO-OPERATION AMONG RAILROADS

There was at one time a superstition that railroad managers had a peculiar advantage because they worked hand and glove. If the consequences had not been so disastrous this would be a screaming joke. You and I know that the real situation was inter-railway war, not inter-railway solidarity. How is it today? Nobody need ask who beheld a group of railway presidents representing a national area standing in the presence of the nation's chief magistrate, solidly behind a chosen leader who uttered language produced in anxious hours of close-knit discussion by men habituated for many months to mutual deference and individual self-effacement. Does anybody suppose the superb skill, tact and wisdom displayed in the appeals which the roads have been making to the public for correction of mail pay would have been possible ten years ago? It is possible now because the necessary human relation has been established.

So with the manufacturers, merchants and bankers. Not one, but several measures of the most far-reaching significance have been put on the books at Washington within two years for the regulation of business. There has never been a time in the memory of the oldest law-maker when business men came to Washington knowing so much about the subjects they desired to discuss or so well prepared to produce a persuasive effect upon Congress. Some of the modifications accomplished in the bills were positive and vital. How did that come about?

Through acquaintance and the habit of consultation.

RAILWAY EQUIPMENT GROUPS

Sitting in this hall are men of the first industrial importance who six years ago did not enjoy a bowing acquaintance. I know this, because I myself have had the delight as well as the astonishment of having to introduce them. You all know what was the state of affairs. Business men interested in the motive power department had annually met and co-operated for a week in connection with the car-builders' and master mechanics' conventions in Atlantic City. A wholly separate contingent gathered about the maintenance of way convention each spring at Chicago. The two might have been distinct crafts with no common interest, or lived in different countries so far as any business activity furnished points of contact.

THE RAILWAY BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

Look at them now. Membership in this Association has brought them together for joint support of a movement, then for co-operation in framing its policy and carrying on its work, and gradually for that personal confidence and friendship which is itself a national asset.

Consider just one thing among the many accomplished during this great red-letter year. It was to boards of trade in the Eastern cities and towns that the campaign of education for larger railway revenue was carried. When the Commission enumerated in its July decision the interests entered as protesting, the list contained not one single business body located in the territory and opposed to the general advance. In what conceivable way could railway supply men have made the facts known as they did to members of bodies to which they belonged if they had not organized, come to know one another and thus put themselves in position first to conduct co-operative studies of the situation upon which literature

and utterances could be based, and second to accept and use with confidence the statements thus prepared?

PERMANENT MECHANISM FOR PROSPERITY

We all hope that when present obstacles are eradicated our country may enter upon an era of renewed growth and prosperity. We carry the scars of strife and calamity. Those scars we cannot bequeath to our sons. To them we can, however, pass on well-established machinery with which to espy in the bud those noxious weeds which, once ripe, poison the land with dissension and infect its people with misery; machinery for checking such growths before they have shot beyond control; machinery for keeping business standards high as new conditions come and for promoting that legislative stability without which imaginative languishes, energy is palsied, and enterprise halts.

Let us keep in mind how organized co-operation works:

ELEVATION OF STANDARDS

First, it reduces the danger of development practices which deserve public regulation. When men act in concert they operate on a higher plane than when they act as individuals. It is a subtle form of the lime-light. Every man is eager to appear at his best. Standards of action rise as rapidly as those of the average member of the group and often as rapidly as those of members much more sensitive than the average to novel obligations. Who pretends that the rage of the people, however artificially stimulated, against leaders in transportation and in business was without basis? We might have avoided the whole costly conflict if we had had large groups with related interests and also large groups representing heterogeneous interests, as we have now, joined in developing standards of conduct. Voluntary action by business bodies has done more to elevate business

ethics than all the laws and all the prosecutions.

DEVELOPMENT OF DIPLOMACY

Second, co-operation develops a winning way with the public. A way that wins men's confidence and in the end wins victories. Documents of this Association have sometimes passed under the scrutiny of a number of the officers and their suggestions embodied before laying a draft before the whole committee—yet never has such a draft failed to draw forth in committee from one to a dozen admonitions which saved us from as many pitfalls. One of the finest experiences we have is when some strong mentality, detained from travelling across the continent to a meeting, throws on the council board by telegraph a flash of insight or information which lights up some paragraph. How fatuous to blunder along without support like that when you can have it!

PROMPTNESS IN MEETING NEW PROBLEMS

Third, co-operation, if organized on a permanent basis, gets to work at the symptom stage instead of waiting till the call for oxygen. If an agitation for remedies is not called for, the time to scotch it is when it starts. If a remedy ought to be applied the appropriate function of those affected is to sit in from the beginning with contributions of knowledge and experience. In either case organized co-operation is equipped to see it coming.

KEEPING DOWN THE LEGISLATIVE DOCKET

Some of our members during the last year have confessed a bashful hesitation about taking matters up with their political representatives. They said they had already approached those gentlemen on so many pending matters that they were afraid their welcome would be worn out. Now the first impulse on hearing that would be to ask who made the docket

anyway. If legislators push to serious consideration all at once dozens of novel propositions affecting business, what is the business man to do but file his say on as many of them as Heaven sends him strength to study? Well, there is another side to that. If managers of commercial and transportation enterprises are to maintain organized co-operation they can do very much to keep down that docket. What they head off by timely repentance on the one hand and by prompt clearing up of misunderstandings on the other will make a gaping hole in the list of national evils shrieking for correction at any one juncture. It need hardly be pointed out how much time and energy of individuals would thus be set free for the tasks of creating, enlarging and administering enterprises for the employment of American workingmen and of American capital.

PROGRESS AND PATIENCE

Our Executive Committee has summarized in the annual report the leading phases of the situation as they view it at the present time in the field of railway regulation. Please note one sentence in that report: "Adapting institutions to new conditions is a slow evolution in a country where the people rule." When the adapting has been undertaken by severe critics of the railroads our Association has been faithful and instant with caution to go slow. We have under those circumstances thanked the Fathers for the impediments which they erected in the path of progress. Now that public clamor is more friendly than critical of the railways and the progress demanded is for their encouragement instead of for their restriction, we must take the bitter with the sweet and possess our souls while the same impediments to rashness postpone realization of our desires. If any principle of policy correctly represents the

spirit by which the Railway Business Association has been animated since its formation that principle has been this—that we should manifest respect for constituted authority, accord to those not yet or not fully in agreement with us the most generous acknowledgment of their sincerity and patriotism, and set an example of patience. When we look back down the road a bit we must confess that we have travelled a tidy little distance from the valley of universal denunciation where we started, to the hill-top of public solicitude for railway welfare whence this morning we view the horizon. When you have the people with you the attainment of reasonable happiness is really only a question of time.

STRIVING TO DESERVE RESPECT

The Railway Business Association may not have done all that it was possible to do, but when you consider the revolution in public sentiment that has come about during the past six years, it is evident that what has happened is what we have been working for. No one will deny, I think, that we have helped. There is one thing sure, we have not hindered the work of conciliation by mistaken zeal, indulgence in utterance offensive to the public, defending any practice that was wrong, nor asked for anything that was not in the public interest. We have studied hard to know what we ought not to do. We have not rushed into print merely for the sake of a show of activity, but have thoughtfully selected some things to do and say, which were properly within our sphere, and said our say in terms of courtesy and with due deference to opposing opinion. With those who constitute the regulatory bodies of our country, and by the press of the country, it is within the bounds of modesty to say, because there is abundant evidence thereof, we are a respected body.

REQUESTS FOR COPIES of this pamphlet will be welcome from all those desiring to place it in the hands of their representatives or friends. Copies furnished or sent direct to lists upon application to Frank W. Noxon, Sec'y Railway Business Association, 30 Church Street, New York.

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